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Asia, the West, and Christianity

By AVRO MANHATTAN

CIVILIZATIONS, like nations, and nations, like individuals, cherish and feed on illusions. But illusions can be harmful. More, they can be dangerous. And if used as palliatives for a harsh reality, they can prove fatal. Reality is the genitor of concrete situations, and concrete situations need concrete solutions. Today mankind is faced with situations of such incommensurable magnitude that, unless solved with unprejudiced urgency, they will soon dissolve in a welter of blood.

The dominating fact at present is that the world of tradition is perilously tottering and near to collapse; indeed, that it is tumbling. Ancient structures have fallen and are falling, new ones have risen and are rising with ever-increasing rapidity. Only four short decades ago Franz Joseph sat on the Austro-Hungarian throne, the Kaiser ruled the German Empire, the Romanovs were Emperors of all Russia, the Sublime Porte held sway in the Near and Middle East, the Manchu Dynasty reigned over China, the U.S.A. was a debtor country, Communism was dreamt of only by a few Utopian idealists. Within the compass of the intervening years there has taken place the Bolshevik Revolution, two world wars, the rise and fall of Fascism, the subsidence of France and England, the gargantuan growth of the U.S.S.R. and of the U.S.A. into two domineering global giants, and now the apocalyptic awakening of a dormant Asiatic continent from the stupor of centuries—an awakening whose swiftness, although foreseeable, has stunned, bewildered, and frightened the West.

The causes of political events, like meteorological ones, however, can be not only detected

but also scrutinized and, indeed, classified. Numberless factors have provoked such tumults. That their main begetters are the ever multiplying applications of science—the promoter, if not the sire, of a global ideology sponsoring world revolution—is probable and possibly correct. That, besides these, the resentment against the claims of the West is a paramount factor in the sullen awakening of Asia is not only correct; it is a certainty.

Asia is on her feet. She is on the move. But no longer under tutelage. She is parting company with the West. Indeed, she is marching against the West. Hers is not simply a reaction against foreign political imperialism or exploiting economic encroachment; it is something deeper; it is the spiritual revolt of the Asian mind against the alien Western one. The longing for economic redressment is a mighty lever. The longing for racial redressment can prove even mightier. A spiritual rebellion animated by the two is well-nigh irresistible. And the Asian rebellion, besides being directed against Western wares, is also directed against Western ideas. For the articles of export of the West were not only such items as movies and printed fabrics, but also religion—i.e., Christianity.

But if the value of goods is best judged by the demand for them, the universality of lofty principles is gauged not by abstractions but by the concrete deeds of their heralds. How do Christian doctrines and practice emerge when examined with the critical eyes of non-Christian races? The judgment is unflattering and, although biased, correct. Christianity never meant or practised what it preached! Particularly when

dealing with non-Christian peoples, Christian missions were never Christian missions alone. They were invariably preceded, accompanied, or followed by Western warehouses, Western diplomacy, and Western armies. Whichever the sequence, the result was eternally the same: the partial or total loss of the regional, national, and racial liberty of the Asiatics, wherever and whenever the Cross and the Western hat had made their appearance. The voluntary or forced acceptance of both was proclaimed to be the victory of Christian civilization. And Christian civilization came to mean whatever tended to be dominant — in other words, whatever was Western—success very often depending on the appearance of naval squadrons off the coasts.

And the inseparability of the trader and the missionary soon yielded ample dividends—namely, the transformation of practically the whole globe into a colony of the West. Backward and highly civilized peoples lost their independence; their cultures were ridiculed, the colour of their skin became a mark of opprobrium; their past, present, and even potential future achievements were scorned and despised—why, their very claim to partake of human nature and thus to have an affinity with the White Race was often resented. This while, at the same time, Western religion preached universal brotherhood, Western democracy the rights of all men, and Western idealists the equality of all races.

In most of the dwellers of Asiatic towns, and even of the four million Asiatic villages, a peculiar conviction grew: that Christianity was synonymous with the West, and the West with Christianity, and that their dissociation was an impossibility. This became a credence not only of the Chinese coolies and Indian peasants but also of the Western nations themselves. To them all, Christianity was the religion of the West. It was an intrinsic part of the West. It was the West. Which was true; as religion, whenever striking roots within a given civilization, soon partakes of the nature of the races forming it. Since its transplantation from Judea, Christianity, in fact, had become Western. And since it had become Western, it became the dominant world religion, not through the strength of its principles but through the physical dominance of the White Race. In spite of—or, possibly, because of—this, Christianity is still spurned by most of Asia as being hopelessly identified with the rapacity of the Western world, of Western imperialism, and of Western white supremacy.

The Asian rejection, however, was prompted by additional, not insignificant, reasons. Prominent

among them was the fact that Christianity has always blessed wars, not only in the lands of the "heathens" but also in the wholly Christian West. Christian nations have stubbornly exulted in recurrent reciprocal massacre and the monstrous promiscuity of church bells pealing with the explosion of dynamite. The two greatest wars ever to ravage mankind were caused neither by Buddhist nor by Islamic peoples. They were ignited by Christian nations. Forty million dead in the first and fifty million in the second world war—indeed, the approaching wiping out of half of mankind with atomic terror—is reckoned a cheap price to save Christian civilization. This, admittedly, is over-simplification. But is not this how the masses see things? In Asia the result is a sudden revolt against both the West and Christianity, the inseparable twins of white supremacy.

To think, however, that Asia has rejected Christianity simply because it is a by-product of the West would be erroneous. Science and industrialism are Western by-products; yet they are welcomed. Marxism is a by-product of Western thought, yet a few decades have sufficed to plant its seeds throughout a continent in which almost two thousand years of Christian efforts were spent with the most dismal result. In the light of this, Asia's contemporary rejection of Christianity but acceptance of a revolutionary ideology is of portentous significance. In this sense: that, whereas the former is spurned not only because of its Westernization but also, and indeed because of, its eschatological message, the latter is embraced because of its promises of concrete redressment, not in any problematical future existence, but in the present one, here and now.

Whether Communism, as the inspirer of a world revolution, is beneficial or harmful is anyone's opinion. Its phenomenal spreading, however, is a fact. Its girdling of the globe, like the growing ring of an unquenchable fire, has caused incalculable repercussions. It has contributed to a swifter awakening of Asia, to a quicker emergence of Asian nationalism, to a fiercer Asian opposition to Christianity. Such a rejection of Christianity is not only of tremendous importance for Asia: it has a universal meaning. For it signifies that the abysmal poverty of the Asian masses is making them reject the religious conception that misery is an inescapable necessity and a manifestation of a divine will. A rejection of the basic eschatological message of religion, therefore, means one thing—the rejection of all religions. In its ampler meaning this is even more portentous. For it signifies that Asia is leaving behind her past. Not only the

colonization of the West, but also the primordial characteristic of her civilization—the resigned acceptance of human suffering, which religion did so much to nurse and to promote.

The transformation of Asia, seen in this light, therefore, although unpalatable to Western pride, is a favourable portent for the future spiritual and political confederation of the globe. For the awakening of Asia is part of the birth of a new world about to be born. A world based no longer upon regional or racial cultures, superior or inferior races, but upon a universal civilization, scornful of traditional religions, and intent, unlike the past, on the physical and cultural betterment not only of a minority but of the vast multitudes of mankind.

Will disrespect of tradition and of religion truly sink man into some mechanical, collectivized Dark Age? A negative or a positive answer could prove equally right or wrong. In the uncertainty, one thing should be remembered—namely, that Christianity and religion, or, indeed, religion and civilization, are not twin brothers. The genius of

Greece and Rome shone forth before Christianity was even conceived.

The true application of the most equitable principles of the French, American, and Russian revolutions could amply prove to the West, not only that it need not fear the awakening of the yellow and black continents, but also that once the exploitation of non-white peoples is but a memory it will be the surest guarantee of the enduring friendship of all the races of the world.

Should Asia and the West, however, misunderstand the tremendous significance of the changes now taking place within and outside themselves, by befouling the hopes of the future with the hatreds of the past, then what is now happening will be but the final stages in the enactment of another global drama. For truly the fecundity of hate breeding hate is enough to dethrone reason in individuals and in continents. In which case a third world war is not only inevitable but will be the precursor of immeasurable new tragedies held in store for mankind in the bottomless abysses of the future.

Heretics in Westminster

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S ashes have been scattered in his garden without any form of service, but he would not have been the only heretic there if he had been buried in Westminster Abbey.

Great walled-in covered spaces are, without a doubt, impressive. A vast factory hall, apart from the fascination of its moving machinery and multitudinous workers, has majesty. When such a space is enclosed by multi-pillared colonnades, enormous rose-windows, mysterious arcades, and Gothic curves, as it is in Westminster Abbey, the beholder is transported into a world of faëry. This is no domain of gay elves, but of solemn spirits, where wide-winged angels their uplifted trumpets blow.

The world of the faëry is the realm of the dead. There, in the half-gloom, for century after century, they stand at the foot of the towering pillars, peer from the great, grey walls, lie proudly beneath stone canopies, or humbly prostrate beneath the passing foot—monuments and medallions, statues, busts, and inscriptions. Some were ensepultured to the rites of incense-burning Rome; some amid the Anglican hymns and prayers. As they were borne on their last journey, the shuddering organ notes dropped down from the dim vaulted roof and the gorgeous cortège stepped slowly up the echoing nave.

For most these were the rites traditional to their land and of their own creed. The grandeur of

centuries and the pomp of kings has made the Abbey a home for England's most honoured dead. Hence it has come about that not all therein memorialized conformed to the Christianity of their day.

The visitor who crosses to the South Transept will find a monument erected four centuries ago to a man of whom it has been written, "Can modern agnosticism point to a denial more emphatic than that made in the fourteenth century of the belief that there exists for us any assurance of the life beyond the grave?" (Prof. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*, 1892). This was Geoffrey Chaucer, who made much jolly fun of the clerics and doctrines of his times, placing theological discussions in the farmyard (*Nun's Priest's Tales*). Alas, as the years wore on and Chaucer's purse became empty, the poet made his retraction.

In front of Chaucer are memorials to Tennyson and Browning. The former, unique as the first poet to be raised to the peerage for his minstrelsy, was also the singer of "honest doubt," the Pantheist who thought Giordano Bruno's god was "in some ways mine" (Allingham, *Diary*) and warned the clergyman who came to administer communion to him a few days before his death that he did not accept Christian doctrine [Note: so in the biography by his son]. Nor did his contemporary, Robert Browning, hold, so we are assured by Mrs. Orr, orthodox beliefs; a